

Chinese American Film Festival establishing a Maritime Silk Road between the east and west

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Abstract Over the last decade, the Chinese American Film Festival has been dedicating itself to promote Chinese culture. Its relentless effort has gained widespread appreciation and recognition from both the Chinese and U.S. mainstream. The Festival aims to establish a lasting international cultural brand, to promote China-U.S. cultural exchanges, and to bring Chinese culture to the international level. Essentially, it has established a Maritime Silk Road across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Keywords Chinese American Film Festival · Culture exchange · Film market · Co-production · Maritime Silk Road

Belief: to exist is to succeed

The Chinese American Film Festival has been held in Los Angeles, known as “the Film Capital of the World”, for 10 years. Ten years of persistence has made it the largest film exchange platform between the U.S. and China, where the highest number of mainstream Hollywood filmmakers come to celebrate Chinese films. It has become a major annual cultural event for the Sino-U.S. film industry and gained official recognition: On July 10th, 2014, the Chinese American Film Festival was proudly selected as one of 104 official Sino-US cultural exchange events, announced by the Secretary of the United States John Kerry and Chinese vice-Premier Liu Yandong during the 5th Round of China-US High-level Consultation on People-to-People Exchange.

EDI media, the organizer of CAFF, has always held the belief that *existence is crucial to success*. Cultural events or media entities shall not seek short-term

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sensations but pursue long-term results. Ten years ago, with the support of China's State Press and Publication Administration of Radio, EDI Media launched the Chinese American Film Festival. At first only a dozen film entries were submitted, which comprised mainly of films produced or directed by friends, with varying degrees of quality. However, I was very grateful. It was the consistent support of these friends, combined with the unyielding persistence of our EDI Media team that culminated in today's achievement. This year, over 200 films and 80 TV dramas entered the festival, 3200 people in the audience, including the leaders of both China and U.S film industries, movie stars, scholars, government officials and community leaders, filled up the Pasadena Civic Auditorium for the Opening Ceremony.

The purpose of holding the Chinese American Film Festival prior to the starting date of the American Film Market was to draw more attention from international investors and producers to the Chinese films. Therefore some friends, including the former AFM chairman Michael Ryan, famous Hollywood producer Andre Morgan, Oscar winners Richard Anderson and Paul Ottosson, Emmy Award winner Dino Hermann, famous producer Omar Kaczmarczyk, L.A County's first lady Christine Hu, and the former president of Columbia College Paul Lo, all came together to help lay the groundwork for the CAFF in our early years.

The Chinese American Film Festival faces many challenges, such as how to maintain the enthusiasm of the whole team, and how to afford the huge expenditure of the fast-growing film festival. Our solutions are effectiveness and devotion. The first is to ensure the effectiveness of the CAFF, establishing a channel of communication between the US and China film industries through close-door meetings between major film groups, Sino-US film financing breakfast, and a multitude of industrial and academic forums. Over the years, the Chinese American Film Festival provided a platform for filmmakers to successfully sell their movies and find investors, as well as forge alliances in co-production. Many agreements were reached including the famous American director James Cameron's establishment of his Chinese headquarters in Tianjin. The festival also presents "Golden Angel Awards" to the Top Ten films every year. All this goes to show the effectiveness of the CAFF and bears witness to our effort in promoting Chinese culture abroad.

Meanwhile, in the spirit of promoting Chinese culture, EDI Media constantly strives to show the world a real, beautiful, and progressive China and a beautiful Chinese dream through films. This is a spiritual belief, and this spirit has created for each member of EDI Media a sense of pride and happiness that comes with selfless devotion. This sense of pride and happiness has also begun spread to other filmmakers from both the US and China, motivating them to participate and contribute to this wonderful event.

Publicize: to be seen, to be experienced in order to be accepted and to thrive

Ten years of Chinese American Film Festival, to talk about survival, we have to first talk about how to publicize, which means to be seen, heard, felt, and experienced. To export a culture, it needs to be publicized, to be seen and experienced.

As an annual Sino-U.S cultural event, the Chinese American Film Festival, first of all, gained mainstream media attention from both China and the U.S through celebrity star power. In the past 10 years, many celebrities including Jackie Chan, Jiang Wen, Tang Guoqiang, Zhao Wei, Huang Xiaoming, Liza Wang, Hsu Xiaoming, Lisa Lu, Kuei Ya-lei, Xu Jinglei, Tong Dawei, Gu Changwei, Jiang Wenli, Hai Qing, Yan Ni, Lin Yongjian, Jiang Wu, Ren Chengwei, Zhang Giangbei, He Zhengjun, Zhang Jingchu, Wang Qianyuan, Gao Yalin, and Hong Jiantao attended the festival and were under the spotlight of American media in Hollywood. Meanwhile, with the emergence of the Chinese film market, which just became the second largest market after the U.S, the box office in China outstripped the domestic number in the U.S., as demonstrated by “Transformer 4” which exceeded US sales by nearly \$100 million. Therefore, under these circumstances, the leaders of the Chinese film industry are naturally on the A-list for American filmmakers and media. For this reason, the Chinese American Film Festival designed a series of events including the “Opening and Golden Angel Award Ceremony”, “China-US Film Festival Night”, “China-U.S Film Co-production Summit”, “Sino-US film sales signing ceremony”, “CAFF Screening Premiere Ceremony”, “CAFF Charity Concert”, “CAFF University tours”, “CAFF Special Screenings”, “CAFF celebrity Meet & Greet”, and “CAFF community benefit screening”. This enables the media to attend various events with more focus and provide a variety of coverage reports.

The committee of Chinese American Film Festival also held more than 400 screenings of over 200 films in more than 20 theaters, attracting nearly 100,000 local audiences, to allow the movie-goers experience in person the beauty and progress of China. The China-US film Co-production Summit also provided the leaders of both the Chinese and American film industries an excellent opportunity to share and discuss, face-to-face, the future of the industry. With CAFF’s high standards and rising popularity, it has also gained mainstream media attention. With the support of both Chinese and American governments, the 10th Chinese American Film Festival opening ceremony will be broadcast nationwide in China on Beijing TV. Sina Entertainment and Hollywood mainstream media ‘Variety’ became the major media sponsors this year. *LA Times* had a full-page coverage on the interview with CAFF’s leading attendee from the Chinese film industry; these media exposures enhanced Chinese films’ visibility in Hollywood.

By creating opportunities for the public to experience Chinese films, for the industry leaders to communicate face-to-face, and for mainstream media from both nations to provide full coverage, the Chinese American Film Festival has attained growth and acceptance through the publicizing of culture.

Recognition: through persistence, through publicizing, but most of all through real strength

The ultimate purpose of spreading Chinese culture internationally is to obtain recognition, no matter how great the culture is, it needs recognition to have influence. The Chinese American Film Festival has slowly gained recognition from

the industry, academia, and government in both China and the U.S. Recognition is achieved through persistence, publicizing, but most of all, through real strength.

I still remember years ago, when the first Chinese American Film Festival was held at the headquarter of the Directors Guild of America (DGA), we were asked not to identify the name CAFF; we could only give out the address to the location. All DGA signs were removed to make sure they gave no endorsement to the festival. With the dramatic development of the Chinese film industry, the Chinese American Film Festival demonstrated time and again the outstanding charm of Chinese culture and the growth of China's soft power. DGA began to place their signs anywhere they could in the venue and even hosted a breakfast for all the Chinese participants of the CAFF, seeking for opportunity to cooperate. Six years after the start of the CAFF, the Motion Pictures of America (MPA) also began to organize annual 'MPA-China co-production film screenings', providing mutual support with the Chinese American Film Festival.

As China became world's second largest film market, especially after the box office of one single film surpassed the revenue in the US market, 'Sino Mania' is spreading among the U.S filmmakers. Many American directors and producers were on-stage at the Chinese American Film Festival in recent years, including renowned directors Luc Besson of 'Lucy' and "Leon', Kathryn Bigelow of 'Hurt Locker', Ted Kotcheff of 'The first Blood', Rob Cohen of "Fast Furious' and 'The Mummy 3', Rob Minkoff of 'the Lion King', Jennifer Yuh Nelson of 'Kung Fu Panda', and accomplished producers Howard Kazanjian of 'Star Wars', Mark Harris of 'Crash', Paula Wagner of 'Mission Impossible', as well as many famous Hollywood stars such as Steve Seagal, Tom Arnold, Eric Mabius, Terri Nunn and Peter Rafelson. Today's filmmakers in China are no longer satisfied with just foreign co-productions. The emergence of diversified modes of cooperation and international investment is solidifying the internationalization of Chinese films. From production to distribution, from investment to cultural extensions, Chinese film makers are advancing onto the international arena with high spirit and solid material. During the 10th Chinese American Film Festival, MPA, major Hollywood film studios, Director Guild of America, Producer Guild of America and American Film Market all vied for the opportunity to meet with the Chinese film delegation looking for opportunities to collaborate.

The Chinese film delegation included Mr. La Peikang, Chairman of China Film Group, Mr. Miao Xiaotian, President of China Film coproduction, Ms. Yang Wenhong, vice president of Shanghai Film Group, Mr. Zhang Rengang, Chairman of Tianjin Film Group, Mr. Li Qinghui, vice president of Changchun Film Group, Mr. Luo Guang, vice president of XiaoXiang Film group, Ms. Zhang Xun, President of Yunnan Film Group, Mr. Yu Dong, Chairman of Bona Film, Mr. Qin Hong, Chairman of Stellar Film, Mr. Gao Jun, president of Goldsome Film, Mr. Bruno Wu, Chairman of Seven Star Entertainment, Ms. An Xiaofen, President of Dasen International, Ms. Wu Bing, President of DMG, Mr. Xiong Xiaoge, vice president of IDG International. Last year, MPA began cooperating with SARFT of China, inviting 5 young Chinese directors to intern at Paramount Pictures. They also gave honorary awards to these five outstanding Chinese young directors during this year's Tenth Chinese American Film Festival. This year, based on official data from the

China Film Bureau, the CAFF also presented the ‘Most popular American films in China’ Award to certain Hollywood studios. Mr. James Su, the Chairman of Chinese American Film Festival, Ambassador Liu Jain, Chinese Consul General in Los Angeles, along with Mr. La Peikang, Chairman of China Film Group, together presented the awards to the representatives from the studios including Mr. Rob Moore, vice Chairman of Paramount Pictures, Mr. Jeffrey Forman, Senior Vice President of Disney Pictures, Mr. Ralph Alexander, senior Executive President of Sony Pictures, Mr. Thomas Molter, Executive Vice President of Warner Bros Pictures and Mr. Sunder Kimatrai, vice president of 21th Century Fox Asian Pacific. Meanwhile, other authority figures from the US film industry, such as Mr. Mike Ellis, President of MPA Asia-Pacific, Mr. Lewis Coleman, vice Chairman of DreamWorks Animation, Mr. Peter Kujawski, president of Universal Pictures International, Mr. Anthony Vogels, vice President of IMAX, Mr. Jon Larson, Associate Western Executive Director of Director Guild of America, Mr. Stu Levy, the Chair of International committee of Producer Guild of America, Mr. Lloyd Kaufman, former Chairman of American Film Market and other industry C- level executives were all award presenters at the opening ceremony. All this goes to show that the internationalization of Chinese culture requires the mainstream recognition from both sides. With China’s ever-increasing soft power, the cultural exchange between China and the U.S will be more equitable, more pragmatic, and more recognized by respective mainstream values.

Branding: before you can achieve recognition, value, and sustainable development, you must first have a brand

During a decade of development for the Chinese American Film Festival, our team has built it into an international cultural brand. Branding is necessary for awareness, for value, and for sustainable development.

To raise brand awareness for the Chinese American Film Festival, EDI Media first established the Asian American Culture and Arts Foundation, a non-profit organization and U.S. government recognized cultural institution, receiving benefits from federal tax and government policy. A trademark for the Chinese American Film Festival was also registered to protect its copyright law. To formally recognize the contributions Chinese American Film Festival has made to international cultural exchange, the United States 112th Congress incorporated an article into the “Congressional Record No. 194 Section 157” praising the Chinese American Film Festival for its tremendous dedication in cultural exchanges between China the United States. This was a remarkable feat, making a permanent mark in the history of United States. President Barack Obama and President George W. Bush have both personally penned congratulatory letters to affirm Chinese American Film Festival as a milestone in the cultural exchange between the two power houses.

Minister Tong Gang of SARFT of China, Director Zhang Hongsen of China Film Bureau, Jiao Hongfen and La Peikang of China Film Group, all had led delegation teams to support the Chinese American Film Festival. Meanwhile, the Chinese American Film Festival has become a supporting organization to Motion Pictures

Association of America for its official China-US film co-production events. In particular, as a result of US Secretary of State John Kerry's visit in Beijing with Chinese vice Premier Liu Yandong in 2014, the Chinese American Film Festival was listed as No.55 out of 104 achievements during the fifth round of Sino-US cultural exchanges and high-level consultations. It further asserts the brand of the Chinese American Film Festival as a national-level cultural event.

To establish the value of Chinese American Film Festival, the organizing committee has made great efforts on selecting film industry professionals as committee members as well as event planning, production and execution. Many Oscar, Emmy, Grammy winners such as "The Godfather" producer Albert Ruddy, "Black Swan" producer Mike Medavoy, "Perhaps Love" and "The Warlords" producer Andre Morgan, "Rush Hour" producer Arthur Sarkissian, "The English Patient" producer Mike Ryan, Director of the East Asian Studies at USC, Professor Stanley Rosen, head of USC US-China Institute Clayton Dube, along with many other well-known Hollywood producers, directors, and film school professors formed the core committee members of the Chinese American Film Festival. This line up adds credibility and authority to the Golden Angle Award, given during the annual Chinese American film Festival. In addition, expert forum discussion, as part of the Chinese American Film Festival, also built a reputation of excellence within the film industry. In addition, the involvement of several mainstream media partners and broadcast stations further elevates the brand value of the Chinese American Film Festival.

Of course, a good cultural brand naturally attracts the partnership and support of other well-known international brands. Throughout the decade, top airlines, national banks, auto makers, telecom companies, international hotel chains and high-end European wines have been named the official and exclusive sponsor within their respective industries. This created a new alliance between well-known international brands and our cultural brand, once again demonstrating both the social value and economic value of the CAFF's cultural brand. Most recently, Chairman Xi Jinping of China delivered an outstanding speech, calling Chinese people from all over the world to the revivification of the "Chinese Dream". Every member of the Chinese American Film Festival team has been working tirelessly towards this common goal, to carry the beauty and deep heritage of Chinese culture on this maritime Silk Road across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, to people around the globe.